TAGA plus

sports business lifestyle

APR/MAY/JUN2021

THE SIRENA PROJECT

Leaf a Legacy

The son (s) also rises

Moms who make us laugh

Q&A: Edward Dela Cruz Jr.

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My sister recently posted on social media a picture of an enormous mango tree in our farm, with the caption that it was our maternal grandfather who planted that tree in the early '70s. I myself remember having to water that tree when it was still a sapling and the shouting matches between my grandfather and dad whenever my grandpa would uproot some innocent plant that my dad had just planted (my grandfather's eyesight was no longer the best and he would sometimes mistake plants for weeds.)

Now the mango tree towers over the entrance to the property, with wide branches spreading over so many square meters and a gazillion fallen leaves that have to be cleared ever day. It is a chore but my sister and our family do not mind.

Of the many comments that picture generated, one stood out for me because it perfectly summed up the beauty and wisdom behind the idea of planting trees. According to the comment, it was author Nelson Henderson who said: "The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

This came to mind after reading Iva Maurin's article in this issue of TAGA *Plus*, titled "Leaf a Legacy." In it, she quotes plant enthusiast Boni Pangelinan as saying: "I sometimes wonder when I'm planting a tree, whether I will be around to harvest the fruit. I guess that's the point of hope and gardening, they go together. I hope our grandchildren and their grandchildren will one day pick a mango we lovingly grew for them." Such a lovely thought. It also brings to focus the idea that planting trees is for the benefit of the future, that grand realities could come from small things, and that such mundane activities as mucking about in the dirt could also be a fertile ground for nurturing hope—hope for a more self-reliant CNMI, hope for growth, hope for sustained life.

We hope you enjoy reading this latest issue of TAGA *Plus*. We welcome criticisms, suggestion, and story ideas. Just send them to editor@saipantribune.com.

Sinseramente,

Jayvee Vallejera
Editor

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COVER ART

One of the participants of the Sirena Project, which teaches women and teenage girls on Saipan how to swim, shows off her newly-acquired skill in the waters off the Guma Sakman in Susupe.

Photo by **LINDSAY NASH**

TAGA plus

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Email:
Beth del Rosario (beth_delrosario@saipantribune.com)
Donna Rivera (donna_rivera@saipantribune.com)
Ericka Santiago (ericka_santiago@saipantribune.com)

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BEACABRERA

Bea is a correspondent for Saipan Tribune and a regular contributor to TAGA *Plus*. This year marks a decade of her not smoking a cigarette but in this issue, she talks to the first cannabis franchisee in the CNMI and why smoking marijuana could be the next big thing for the economy. Contact her at beacabrerasaipan@gmail.com.

KIMBERLY B.ESMORES

Kimberly is not embarrassed to admit that she is a proud happy wife to a voluntarily miserable husband. She is *Saipan Tribune*'s newest sports reporter, so she is still learning the ropes of interpreting the scores of golf and mixed martial arts, so be kind to her rookie efforts. Contact her at kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com.

IVAMAURIN

Iva, a wannabe farmer, is ecstatic because the wild chili seeds she planted have magically grown and are finally fruiting. She's also hoping to harvest the soursop she planted in their yard before vermin gets it (yikes!). In her story for this quarter's TAGA *Plus*, she got to talk about gardening with one of her inspirations, Boni Pangelinan, whose fruit and veggie garden at home she hopes to someday replicate. Iva hopes that through Boni's garden, more will be inspired to grow their own food. Contact her at ivamaurin@gmail.com.

JASONMIYASHITA

Jason is the managing director of Raymond James & Associates in Guam where he is also senior institutional consultant and senior vice president, Investments. Miyashita has more than 15 years of experience in the financial services industry and was born and raised in Guam. Contact him at jason.b.miyashita@raymondjames.com.

ROSELYNMONROYO

The words "beauty pageant" always remind Roselyn about Sandra Bullock and her famous line "world peace" in the hit movie Miss Congeniality. Seeing Miss Earth Northern Marianas candidates plant trees and pick up trash to protect our environment reminds Roselyn that beauty pageants are more than just showcasing women's physical attributes, talents, and intelligence. Contact her at roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com.

LINDSAYNASH

Lindsay is a writer and photographer living on Saipan. As part of Women's History Month, she ran in a pink tutu in the first ever NMI Women's 10K. This inspired her to look for other events just for women, where she discovered the Sirena Project. Email her at lindsayinsaipan@gmail.com.

JUSTINENAUTA

Justine is one of *Saipan Tribune*'s newest reporters. With the love and admiration she has for her culture, she is more than thrilled when sharing her pictures of every sight and scent she comes across. Contact her at justine_nauta@saipantribune.com.

MARKRABAGO

Mark is now into jogging after retiring from basketball. He tries to jog 4 kilometers three times a week. He has also stopped collecting toy robots (dolls according to his editor) and will henceforth collect finisher's medals and running shoes. Contact him at mark_rabago@saipantribune.com.

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FEEDBACK METER
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Vegetarian tacos

Wrapped with corn or flour tortillas or even lettuce leaves, tacos have become a national favorite. Whether for breakfast, lunch or dinner they're easy to eat and can be easy to make. Here's a vegetarian taco made with soft whole wheat tortillas. They are fold easily and add an earthy flavor to the taco.

LINDAGASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service

HELPFUL HINTS:

- Any type of canned beans can be used. Be sure to drain them well.
- Any type of onion can be used.
- Any type of flour tortilla can be used.
- A quick way to defrost corn kernels is to place them in a colander and run hot water over them.

COUNTDOWN:

- Make Avocado Salad and set aside.
- Make Vegetable Taco.

SHOPPING LIST:

To buy: 1 red onion, 2 small avocados, 1 package shredded lettuce, 1 package frozen corn kernels, 1 can reduced-sodium black beans, 1 jar mild salsa, 1 package reduced-fat sharp Cheddar cheese, 1 carton reduced-fat sour cream, 1 package 8-inch lite whole wheat tortillas, 1 bottle reduced-fat oil and vinegar dressing and 1 can vegetable oil spray.

DREAMSTIME/TNS

VEGETABLE TACO

Recipe by Linda Gassenheimer

- Vegetable oil spray
- 1/2 cup sliced red onion
- 1 cup frozen corn kernels, defrosted
- 1 cup reduced-sodium canned black beans rinsed and drained
- 1/2 cup mild salsa
- 2, 8-inch lite whole wheat tortillas
- 1/2 cup reduced-fat shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
- 1/4 cup reduced-fat sour cream

Heat a medium-size nonstick skillet over medium-high heat and spray with vegetable oil spray. Sauté onion for one minute. Add the corn, beans and salsa and continue to sauté 2 to 3 minutes to warm the ingredients. Divide in two and place in center of each tortilla. Sprinkle the cheese on top and add the sour cream. Fold in half.

The whole wheat tortillas are soft enough to fold. If using other tortillas, wrap them in paper towels and microwave 20 seconds.

Yield 2 servings.

Per serving: 391 calories (25% from fat), 10.8 g fat (4.3 g saturated, 4.2 g monounsaturated), 18 mg cholesterol, 22.2 g protein, 59.5 g carbohydrates, 17.2 g fiber, 904 mg sodium.

SLICED AVOCADO SALAD

Recipe by Linda Gassenheimer

- 2 small avocados to make 1 cup sliced
- 2 cups shredded lettuce
- 2 tablespoons reduced fat oil and vinegar dressing
- Cut the avocado in half. Remove the pit and carefully peel the skin. Place the avocado cut side down and slice. Divide the lettuce between 2 dinner plates. Place avocado slices on top of the lettuce. Drizzle dressing over the avocado slices.
- Yield 2 servings.

Per serving: 136 calories (78% from fat), 11.8 g fat (1.6 g saturated, 7.5 g monounsaturated), 1 mg cholesterol, 2.1 g protein, 8.5 g carbohydrates, 5.9 g fiber, 13 mg sodium.

Linda Gassenheimer is the author, most recently, of Simply Smoothies: Fresh & Fast Diabetes-Friendly Snacks & Complete Meals and Fast and Flavorful: Great Diabetes Meals from Market to Table and The Flavors of the Florida Keys. Her website is dinnerinminutes.com. Follow her on Twitter @lgassenheimer. Email: linda@dinnerinminutes.com.

Vegetarian tacos.

JASON B.MIYASHITA
jason.b.miyashita@raymondjames.com
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

Asset allocation

The combination of investments you choose can be as important as your specific investments. The mix of various asset classes, such as stocks, bonds, and cash alternatives, account for most of the ups and downs of a portfolio's returns.

Deciding how much of each you should include is one of your most important tasks as an investor. That balance between potential for growth, income, and stability is called your asset allocation. It doesn't guarantee a profit or ensure against a loss, but it does help you manage the level and type of risks you face.

Balancing risk and return

Ideally, you should strive for an overall combination of investments that can help to minimize the risk you take in trying to achieve a targeted rate of return. This often means balancing more conservative investments against others that are designed to provide a higher return but that also involve more risk. For example, let's say you want to get a 7.5% return on your money. Your financial professional tells you that in the past, stock market returns have averaged about 10% annually, and bonds roughly 5%. One way to try to achieve your 7.5% return would be by choosing a 50-50 mix of stocks and bonds. It might not work out that way, of course. This is only a hypothetical illustration, not a real portfolio, and there's no guarantee that either stocks or bonds will perform as they have in the past. But asset allocation gives you a place to start.

NOTE: *Asset allocation and diversification don't guarantee a profit or ensure against a loss. All investing involves risk, including the potential loss of principal, and there can be no guarantee that any investing strategy will be successful*

Many publications feature model investment portfolios that recommend generic asset allocations based on an investor's age. These can help jumpstart your thinking about how to divide up your investments. However, because they're based on averages and hypothetical situations, they shouldn't be seen as definitive. Your asset allocation is—or should be—as unique as you are. Even if two people are the same age and have similar incomes, they may have very different needs and goals. You should make sure your asset allocation is tailored to your individual circumstances.

Many ways to diversify

When financial professionals refer to asset allocation, they're usually talking about overall classes: stocks, bonds, and cash, or cash alternatives. However, there are others that also can be used to complement the major asset classes once you've got those basics covered. They include real estate and alternative investments such as hedge funds, private equity, metals, or collectibles. Because their returns don't necessarily correlate closely with returns from major asset classes, they can provide additional diversification and balance in a portfolio.

Even within an asset class, consider how your assets are allocated. For example, if you're investing in stocks, you could allocate a certain amount to large-cap stocks and a different percentage to stocks of smaller companies, or allocate based on geography. Bond investments might be allocated by various maturities, with some money in bonds that mature quickly and some in longer-term bonds. Or you might favor tax-free bonds over taxable ones, depending on your tax status and the type of account in which the bonds are held.

Monitoring your portfolio

Even if you've chosen an asset allocation, market forces may quickly begin to tweak it. For example, if stock prices go up, you may eventually find yourself with a greater percentage of stocks in your portfolio than you want. If they go down, you might worry that you won't be able to reach your financial goals. The same is true for bonds and other investments.

Do you have a strategy for dealing with those changes? Of course you'll probably want to take a look at your individual investments, but you'll also want to think about your asset allocation. Just like your initial investing strategy, your game plan for fine-tuning your portfolio periodically should reflect your investing personality.

Even if you're happy with your asset allocation, remember that your circumstances will change over time. Those changes may affect how well your investments match your goals. At a minimum, you should periodically review the reasons for your initial choices to make sure they're still valid. Also, some investments, such as mutual funds, may actually change over time; make sure they're still a good fit.

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Leaf a Legacy

IVAMAURIN
iva_maurin@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

Who

would have thought that a simple tomato experiment would lead to a full-blown, solid passion for growing gardens? This is the story of Boni Pangelinan.

A long-time educator with the Public School System, Miss Boni, as she is affectionately called, has found, albeit by accident, love and solace in gardening for almost three decades now.

My husband and I were fortunate to experience her yard, and as we walked and talked between beds of flowers and vegetables, we found ourselves inspired, longing for the day when we would have a similar garden of our own—hopefully someday soon.

"I never saw myself as the 'gardener' type," Boni said. "Like most people, I didn't believe I had a green thumb, but after my first tomato experiment, I was hooked."

Boni says she started her garden by chance. "I sliced some tomatoes into an old plastic Taco Bell container and waited to see if seeds would sprout. After a few weeks, I was surprised to see some green leaves and a few months later I had tomatoes!"

The budding gardener then started reading up on horticulture, watching videos on YouTube, and asking just about everyone she knows for tips on gardening.

Fast forward to a couple of years and Boni's garden has been transformed, now brimming with life—with garden beds filled with, yes, even more tomatoes, different types of kale, bitter gourd, herbs and flowers, and surrounded by citrus and banana trees, soursop trees, and more.

Really, it is like having a food paradise in one's own home.

'More than just vegetables and flowers'

As an educator, Boni strongly believes in the strength support systems can give students, including mental wellness and opportunities that would ignite their

interest, especially critical during their formative years.

"As a budding gardener, I feel the same thing applies to my own learning experience. The more I work in my garden, the more I learn about myself and my relationship with the environment. I started gardening quite by accident and have found that it gives me back way more than just vegetables and flowers," she said. "I realized that there was so much more to growing food than I first imagined. I envisioned a romantic English potager filled with flowers and produce, [then] learned that what I was actually doing was improving the soil biology in my land and contributing to the life of bees, another crucial component of environmental stewardship. This led me to discover other benefits as well, such as the relationship between nature and mental health."

In June 2019, Boni started Leaf a Legacy to connect with other people who wanted to share secrets, lessons learned, and tips about gardening. "I was sick of being depressed about the aftermath of super typhoons Soudelor and Yutu. I wanted to be around people with contagious enthusiasm and a literal growth mindset." Leaf a Legacy started off with 12 members and, after almost two years later, now has 232 members who share photos, trade plants, barter fruit and generally build one another up.

"… Growing and eating our own produce can literally improve the lives of our people. Imagine diverting a portion of your income normally reserved to purchase food, a necessity to live, and using it to invest in entrepreneurship, education, or other interests? Imagine what would happen if more happy people, healthy people existed? I know it sounds simplistic but gardens could start a positive contagion of joy! We definitely could use more of that."

Boni dreams of a CNMI where support is provided to anyone who wants to grow food, given that people are now so reliant on shipments that bring food into the islands.

"The CNMI is small, every available space is precious. Green spaces mean thriving wildlife, source of food, and even on our tiny little rock, green spaces can

> **The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.**
>
> —Nelson Henderson, author

contribute to a stronger Earth. We all have a part to play in how much longer our natural resources can sustain us. If we don't start taking that responsibility seriously, we stand the chance of watching all the most beautiful things about the Marianas disappear," she said. "Not everyone has to be a gardener, just like not every garden has eggplant, but in every garden, there has to be pollinators…pollinators to carry messages of positivity and encouragement to those who believe in the power of food security."

These pollinators, she says, can be government, grants, researchers, education or private sector funding support, and, at more grassroots level, people cheering other people on—and not just on gardening.

Seeds of inspiration

Boni is, indeed, one of these pollinators. And, just as she inspires many on island, she, herself, is inspired too, by her many garden gurus.

"I had always been inspired by gardeners, the late Rick Gramlich who started the Young Farmer's Club when I was a principal at San Vicente Elementary School; Victor and Angel Cabrera who grew herbs and vegetables I had only ever seen in grocery stores in the [United States]; James Montenegro, who at Dan Dan Middle School, taught kids how to grow food and raise chickens, Monie Manalo, and so many more local people who loved to plant."

She also credits her husband, Wayne, as her biggest cheerleader, turning her vision into reality by creating, from her imagination and ramblings, spaces where she could grow food. "I'm the thinker and he's the organizer and that makes for the most fun adventures. It's taken two years, but my little patio herb garden is now a beautiful, functional refuge for us and the wildlife on our land."

As for what makes a healthy garden? Boni says its water, sun, nutrients and a good gardener.

She believes one doesn't have to have a green thumb to get into gardening. What is important is to have an attitude of growth—to get immersed in gardening not to succeed, but with an expectation to learn.

"I sometimes wonder when I'm planting a tree, whether I will be around to harvest the fruit. I guess that's the point of hope and gardening, they go together. I hope our grandchildren and their grandchildren will one day pick a mango we lovingly grew for them."

That day, my husband and I left Boni's garden sincerely hopeful. It's just inspiring to see someone who started gardening from scratch—just by experimenting, and now, having a living, food-bearing wonderland in her own backyard. When we got home, I started daydreaming about all the things we can do and grow even in what little green space we currently have.

"Find your passion and go for it, whether it's growing food or something else that helps you find safe harbor in today's world," Boni imparts, not just to me, but to all of us in the community.

"Gardening is important to me because it is the self-care choice that I enjoy, but there are so many other worthwhile protective factors in our community, enough for everyone who has an interest. We can all be gardeners in a large scale and the CNMI can be our thriving, lush and beautiful plot."

"Too many times our end game is the tomato, but the real success is understanding, just like life. …It's amazing what life exists in a tiny little seed, a dried-up shell. …It is the promise of generations, the promise of futures, that lives in a seed."

For all the pollinators in the CNMI—everyone who loves creating green spaces and growing food, check out Leaf a Legacy on Facebook and help spread the love of gardening across the CNMI one seedling at a time.

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EDWARD Dela Cruz Jr.

MARKRABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Associate Editor

At the time of the publication of his quarter's *TAGA* Plus, Edward Dela Cruz Jr. would have extended his streak of days running at least a mile a day to more than 1,500 days. That's more than four years (around 1,553 days and about 4,542 miles to be exact)!

Dela Cruz, a U.S. Army veteran and former youth director of the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa, used to tip the scales at 220 lbs. But he traded his beloved Yugioh or Pokémon cards in 2017 for a pair of running shoes and has never looked back. Now the svelte 160-lb firefighter is not only taking part in local races but has also collected more than a dozen medals from virtual races and started an online running club composed of like-minded calorie-burning junkies.

More than four years since he did his best Forrest Gump impression, Dela Cruz has managed to run seven half-marathon races, a couple of 10K races, one 8K race, four 5K races, two obstacle races, and 13 distance challenges race.

"My 2016 self would cry if he knew what he was going to get himself into. Targeting for the Boston Marathon now. Boston or die," Dela Cruz said in a recent social media post.

TAGA *Plus* caught up with Dela Cruz and he is this quarter's *TAGA* Plus Q&A.

How did you get into running?

I honestly really hated it. I just went through some mental depression and wanted to give up on life. I knew I had to cut weight to feel better mentally so I know I needed to run. My nephew, T.J. Manglona, mentioned we should start running on Jan. 12, 2017. We showed up at the Beach Road Pathway and did a mile. Then I thought to myself, "Why don't I do this for 30 days?" I remember a friend of mine, Terence Leung, ran two miles every day for a month or two non-stop so I committed to it but 1 mile only. Well, 30 days came up, then I said I'll do 90, then it led to 120, then I told myself I might as well hit 365. I still haven't stopped.

How do you motivate yourself?

There really is no motivation anymore. I just do it. It's as mandatory like brushing your teeth, showering, and eating your meals every day. It's a daily routine. I just have to run. …It's already burned into my system to run each day and it feels just as natural and second nature as walking. I just go. I always have a pair of shorts and running shoes in the trunk of my car.

What are your favorite running spots on island?

Beach Road and the Oleai track. I never thought I would enjoy running in circles but it has done tremendous wonders for my mile time and raising my VO2 max (maximal oxygen uptake). I used to hate it and say it's only for sprinters. Now I'm versatile with long-distance running and short-distance sprinting.

How often do you run in a week and how long?

I started with 1 mile a day so that's about 7-14 miles a week for my routine for three years, However, since I started Dr. Ron Snyder's Run the Marianas Challenge, my mileage has significantly changed. I run 50 miles a week now. That's about 7.14 miles a day. But it really depends on what my run schedule is for the day—if it's a long-distance jog or sprints or an easy 3-mile rest day. The mileage will hit 50. My rest day is very different compared to regular athletes. I run everyday, right? Any day that I just have to jog for streak mileage and I don't have to break a sweat is a rest day for me. Running 1 mile for the day feels like I committed a capital sin now. I cannot just run a single 1 mile and walk away feeling okay with it.

Do you prefer running in the morning or evening? Why?

For nearly my entire running journey, I preferred to run 5pm sunset because it's the best time. It's not too hot and not too cold. I hate waking up early. Again, after signing up for Run Marianas, that view changed. I run anytime of the day and sometimes up to three sessions. If I don't have the time to run distance for that day I will break them into split session in one day. Example I would run 5am for 3 miles. Then at 12pm I would squeeze in 3 miles. At 5pm I would get in another 6-7 miles. Saipan's heat really doesn't bother me anymore. Anytime, anywhere mentality! I tell God every time when I go out on a hot afternoon run if He's going to take me, then just do it but I'm getting this run in right now.

Do you eat before running or after?

It really doesn't matter. I do intermittent fasting. I don't eat between 8pm to 12pm. That is what I follow.

What's your pre-run meal/snack? Post-run meal/snack?

I will never have a pre-meal snack because I hate feeling any sense of something in my stomach for when I take off and especially for sprint days. Post-runs in the evening are always 48 grams of whey protein shake.

How long is a short run for you? How about a long run?

I never use runner's ego when describing a short or long run. I really hate that elitist mentality runners use to define it. I follow what athletics define as short and long

distance. Anything below 1.86 miles is short distance for me. Anything higher than that is considered long distance.

How do you keep yourself hydrated during a run?

I honestly never drink water on a run unless I run longer than 60 minutes and the sun is out. Depends on the intensity as well. I either drop small water bottles at water points at where I know I'm going to need it or I stop by a store if I really need it on a run and grab a bottle. I hate carrying water or using a hydration vest or belt. I don't understand how runners can run with those things. It's a huge pain for me.

Do you stretch before and after a run?

I used to not do it but since August 2020 I started taking it seriously. I only take about 15 minutes before I run. After a run I take my time and go for up to 30 minutes with a foam roller and a massage gun.

What are your preferred running shoes and apparel for running?

For running shoe If you asked me this question before 2021 I will say ASICS. As of today, I do not have a definitive go-to running shoe. It depends on what the run is. Every day running I can still run with my ASICS Nimbus or Glide Ride. For workout running days it would be the Saucony Endorphin Speed or Saucony Endorphin Pro. For race days you will find me running with either the Nike Vaporfly Next% or Nike Alphafly Next%. Ask me this again after 2021 when I have tested out Hoka One One Carbon X2, Adidas Adizero Adios Pro, and Brooks Hyperion to give a definitive answer.

For running apparel I am sorry but Run Guam has stolen my heart with their running gear. I will always use their tech for my runs. If you have not heard of them you have to check their online store. Their running gear is the best and I run with such comfort and safety. Shout out to the Mendell Brothers and Sherwin Paet for such amazing gear! Run Guam forever!

Do you run with any gadgets?

I used to run with my phone, Apple Watch, and AirPods but I have let that go. Apple Watch is a terrible watch for running. It's an amazing smartwatch and the best in the business but for running it's a natural disaster. Don't even get me started on it's terrible battery life. If you enjoy constantly charging your phone and AirPods, add the watch into it and it's a lot of time wasted in your day. I upgraded to the COROS Pace 2 and it's amazing. For $200 you get the metrics and perks of a premium Garmin watch at such a great price if you're into saving money. Battery life is 30 hours on a full run GPS mode. I only need to charge my COROs Pace 2 every two weeks. Garmin cannot compare to GPS battery life COROs has. COROS Pace 2 also has as a built-in track mode for my track days and is pretty accurate for me. Made my life so much easier for speed session days.

I stopped listening to music while running. It made me a better runner. I listen to my breathing and pay attention to my stride, cadence, and foot strike now rather than music. Music is just plain distraction for me now.

I stopped with my phone because that's a distraction too. Either when people call me or throws my balance off while running. If I need to make a call I'll just run faster back to my car.

What's better—running alone or with a running mate?

Running with people is what I love. You have company. You get to push each other, motivate each other, and support each other.

Why do you like running? What do you get from it?

I love running because it's something that brings people together. I love the social part about it the most. There are so many things that divide people like politics, ethnicity, geographic locations, religion, race, gender, you name it. But with running, everyone connects easily and breaks those barriers. It doesn't matter if you're an Olympian, 12-time Boston Marathon runner, or just someone that jogs a mile once in a while. You will connect and have that commonality through the sport. Runners are generally the most positive-minded and nice people because of the things they go through with running. Also, you don't have to spend on anything except a decent pair of running shoes, running shorts, and a shirt! No gym membership required to run.

Any tips for aspiring runners out there?

Just do not give up. Persevere through adversity. It will hurt but the rewards are priceless. Running changed my life. Reach out to me and I will help you for free! You can join our running club on Facebook called Run Saipan (inspired by our brothers from Run Guam) and our Strava run club also called Run Saipan. The biggest thing any runner needs is motivation and support. Our fleet of runners are here for you.

Moms who make us laugh so we don't cry

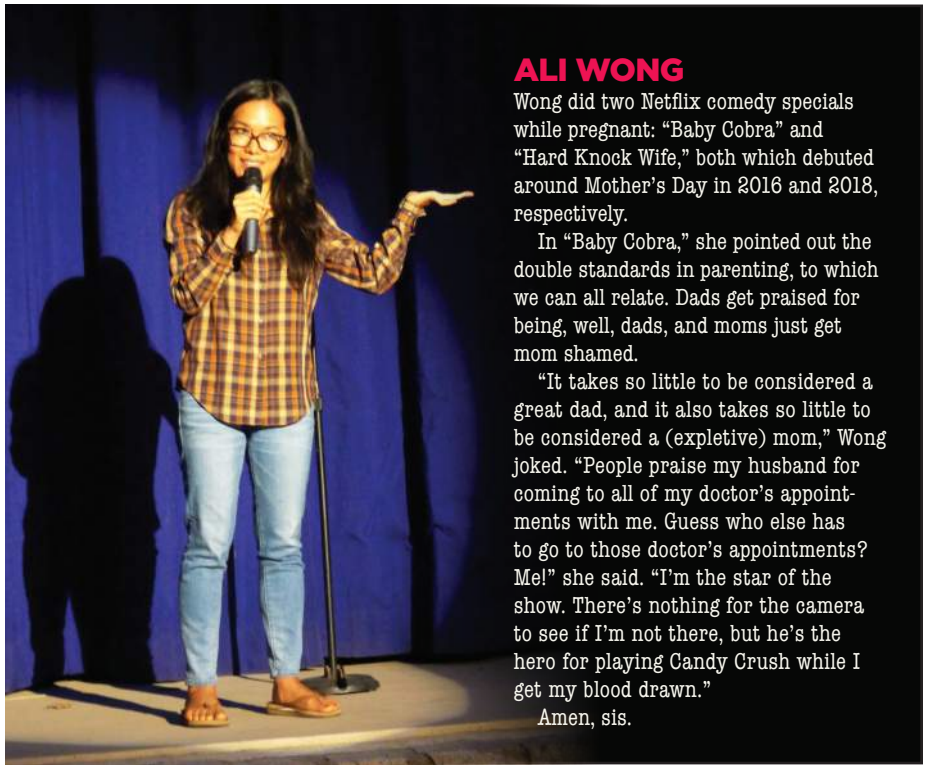
Motherhood often requires some comedic relief—especially when you're exhausted, covered in vomit and probably haven't showered in two days.

Or perhaps you're on day two of a stand-off with your teenager who refuses to shower. It really just depends on where you are in life.

Luckily, there are lots of funny moms out there talking about the wild journey of birthing children and raising them into semi-decent human beings.

Follow these hilarious (and famous) moms on social media when you need some I-feel-you, you-aren't-in-this-alone, parenting real talk that will also make you laugh.

AMYHANELINE
USA Today



ALI WONG

Wong did two Netflix comedy specials while pregnant: "Baby Cobra" and "Hard Knock Wife," both which debuted around Mother's Day in 2016 and 2018, respectively.

In "Baby Cobra," she pointed out the double standards in parenting, to which we can all relate. Dads get praised for being, well, dads, and moms just get mom shamed.

"It takes so little to be considered a great dad, and it also takes so little to be considered a (expletive) mom," Wong joked. "People praise my husband for coming to all of my doctor's appointments with me. Guess who else has to go to those doctor's appointments? Me!" she said. "I'm the star of the show. There's nothing for the camera to see if I'm not there, but he's the hero for playing Candy Crush while I get my blood drawn."

Amen, sis.

AMY SCHUMER

Like Wong, Schumer hit the stage while pregnant for Netflix comedy special "Growing." Even though the comedian suffered from hyperemesis gravidarum, or severe morning sickness, throughout her pregnancy, she was able to joke about the trials of growing a human.

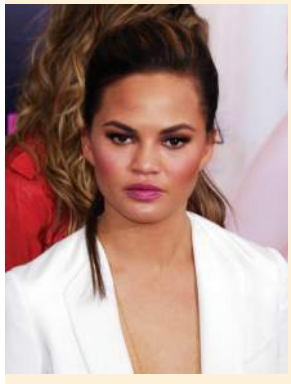
Women don't talk about how hard it is, she joked. "You (expletive) all lie about it."

"If you've ever had food poisoning, it's that. I've had that every day for five months," Schumer said.

She did note one bright spot: "The best part about it is not getting your period. That's the silver uterine lining if you want to look for one."

Schumer welcomed son Gene with husband Chris Fischer in May.

She continues to make light of motherhood on Instagram, sharing photos of herself pumping breast milk, rocking "hospital underwear for life!" and feeling mixed emotions about going back to work.



CHRISSY TEIGEN

Teigen isn't a comedian by trade, but we can't deny the fact that the model is a hilarious mom. She shares two kids with musician John Legend.

In one totally relatable post to Instagram, Teigen shared a photo of her daughter, Luna, 3, and son, Miles, 1, feuding over a toy on her lap. "Everything's fine over here," she captioned it.

Teigen is also known for her fiery, heaping doses of shut-the-heck up when someone dares to come after her or her kids on social media.

She's been open about fertility struggles and postpartum depression and won't stand for anyone's antics.

After revealing the couple used in vitro fertilization, one Twitter user asked: "Did you give it a minute to try naturally or are you avoiding 'the act?'"

Her response was funny, yet effective: "Hi Linda, thanks for asking, you complete witch. I tried for about 9 years. Anything else, let me know!"

MAYIM BIALIK

"The Big Bang Theory" has come to an end. But, the good news is that Bialik is back to being a "proud" stay-at-home mom and sharing funny videos on YouTube.

In one tongue-in-cheek video, she answered all of her critics' burning questions about raising her kids to be vegan. She joked the most-asked question is "Will they live?"

The mom of two sons, ages 10 and 13, could barely spit the question out without laughing.

"Children can thrive without eating meat and without eating dairy. Period," the mom said, noting the only vitamin vegans can't get is vitamin B-12.

Bialik also got real about her kids growing older.

"I'm used to whipping out carrot sticks like they're a six shooter," she said. "I'm used to putting Band-Aids on boo boos. I'm used to nursing away hunger and pain and fear... Like, I'm used to being the most important person in their lives. Now I'm a presence in a new way."

We feel you.

KRISTIN AND JEN

Comedians Kristin Hensley and Jen Smedley started making "I Mom So Hard" videos in the midst of becoming mothers, and the wine-sipping, Spanx-wearing duo exploded to fame from there.

Their "I Spanx So Hard" video went viral as the moms hilariously squeezed themselves into the slimming shape wear.

"It's supposed to make my body look like it has an hourglass figure, but it's more like an hour and a half," Kristin jokes.

The moms joke about everything from potty training to embracing their postpartum bodies. "I Moms So Hard" now has a live comedy tour, a book and a stand-up special on Amazon Prime.

CAT AND NAT

Another funny mom duo, best friends Catherine Belknap and Natalie Telfer have taken motherhood by storm with their make-your-stomach-hurt mom truths.

Cat and Nat have seven children between them, but in between bedtime stories and making lunches, the moms capture their uncensored talks about parenting on video--usually in the front seat of the car.

These two don't sugar coat anything. In their video titled "What they DON'T tell you about childbirth," the moms talk about postpartum reality.

"You're going to need an ice pack. You think the ice pack may be for your head or to cool you down? Un un. Try again! It's for your cooch!"

Cat and Nat have a touring show, podcast, book and game.

KRISTEN BELL

The always-funny Bell, who shares two daughters with actor Dax Shepard, is pretty private about posting pictures of her kids on social media, but she's hilariously honest when it comes to mom life.

In the video series "Momsplaining" with the "Ellen" show, Bell gets real about postpartum depression, gives producer Andy Lassner a hint of what labor pains feel like and talks sleep deprivation with Melissa McCarthy.

Season 3 introduced us to the animal "queendom."

"I mean those male animals aren't pushing babies out of their furry hoo-has are they?" she joked. Later in the video, Bell admits to gaining 47 pounds while pregnant.

Phew! Thanks for being real, mama.

HEATHER LAND

With a little bit of Southern charm, comedian Land has fans everywhere peeing their pants over her insanely viral videos with a Snapchat filter where the mom always declares, "I ain't doin it!"

For example, in her video "I Ain't Doin It—First Day of School Pictures," Land jokes she doesn't understand how parents capture those perfect back-to-school photos.

"I had an easier time recovering from a third-degree tear after childbirth than getting my 16-year-old to cooperate."

She always ends with a zing.

"I would rather accidentally brush my teeth with hemorrhoid cream then try to get a picture. I ain't doin it!"

Land does stand-up comedy shows around the country and has a book.

KRISTINA KUZMIC

Kuzmic pairs hope with humor in her often-viral videos.

Some of her messages are serious, like surviving a difficult divorce and grief after a miscarriage. But often, she takes a sarcastic, witty and good-hearted approach to tackling parenthood.

In one video, Kuzmic goes after mom-shamers with "How not to mom-shame (a handy tutorial)." During a scene where a woman approaches a pregnant women and says, "Another one?" a fail buzzer chimes.

"No no no no no. Here's a short list of things you don't say to a pregnant women," Kuzmic says. "You don't do a snarky 'Another one?' You don't use words like huge, enormous, elephant or gigantic when describing her body."

Kuzmic has a live tour, book, a blog and three adorable children.

ROTA

JUSTINENAUTA
justine_nauta@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

My friends and I recently took a trip to Saipan's sister island, Rota. It took us about 30 minutes to get there once we took off from Saipan. Once we arrived at the Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport, my friends and I hopped on our tour guide's truck and off we went! For once, my friends and I felt tourist-like—something I haven't felt in years. As we were on our way to our first spot, we noticed that everyone in a car who passed by waved at us! Literally. Every. Single. Car. Naturally, we waved back, and we did that the whole time we were there.

Our tour guide, who's a close friend of a friend, took us straight to the lookout on Rota called the Songsong Village Lookout. We spent about 15 minutes admiring the view while our tour guide was pointing out all the "tourist spots." We stayed on Rota for three days but made sure we did everything we could. My friends and I got to meet Taga, and he was taller than I expected. I am a 4'11" lady and Taga was at least 8 feet tall. I can only imagine how tall I would've been if I was born during his time. One can only imagine!

Our tour guide brought us to our beach house (Rota 1 picture) where we spent two nights and three days. The beach house is a two-story house but not a typical one. The second floor was open and had three single beds, a bookshelf, and a drawer with things that were needed—first aid kit, goggles, flippers, and more. The first floor had two bedrooms, one bathroom with a washer, then a kitchen, dining room and living room. The first night our tour guide and his friends made us delicious barbecue! He called some of his other friends over and we had a "first night on Rota" party. The hospitality was incredible. It is a no-brainer why Rota is called "The Friendliest Island." No, really. It's written on the airport building once you arrive.

From hiking 45 minutes to nowhere trying to find the infamous waterfall, to touring Rota's Cave Museum, to a farm tour where we ate fresh pomelos and fresh hot pepper (which was really spicy), to also seeing a great view from the mountains, we ended at a swimming dock. Literally, three hours before we had to catch our flight, my friends and I went to a swimming dock near Rota's airport where we spent an hour-and-a-half swimming. After that, we went straight to the airport and back to Saipan.

Rota was one for the books and an experience no one can take from me or my friends! However, I would like to point out that before anyone books a trip to Rota, they should carefully plan beforehand because this trip my friends and I took was spontaneous!

Photos by JUSTIN NAUTA

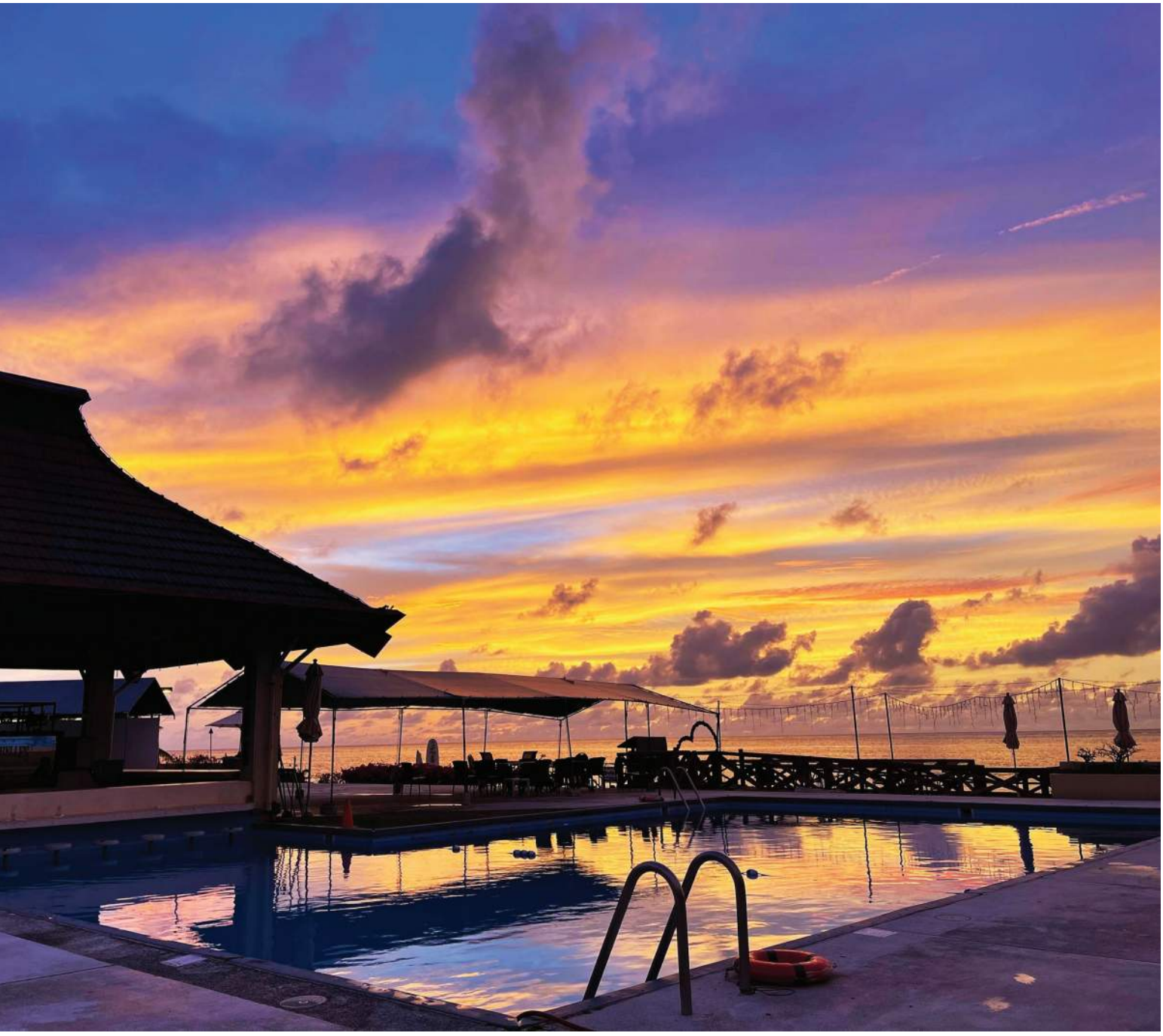
TINIAN

Another spontaneous trip my friends and I made was Tinian's 17th Annual Tinian Hot Pepper "Pika" Festival. It was my first time on Tinian without my parents and my first time attending the Pika Festival. We also stayed for two nights and three days, which was, again, amazing! For the Pika Festival, my friends and I only had one bed-and-breakfast room with two beds but, sadly, no car. It was all rented by everyone who went to Tinian to attend the festival, so my friends and I walked literally everywhere—the festival, JC's Café, Queens Club, Taga Beach…everywhere. Fortunately, on our last night there, our Air BnB landlord gave us a car for the night. My friends and I drove everywhere or at least tried to. We wanted to get lost but because it was too dark, we decided against it. During the Pika Festival, my friends and I experienced everything—the food, drinks, hospitality, live performances, and even a guy carving names on a spondylus.

Our second day on Tinian was spent a little at JC's Café and then the whole afternoon on Taga Beach. Since we still didn't have a car, we bought food and drinks (non-alcoholic, of course) to make sure

that we didn't need anything else once we got there. Once we got to the beach, we went straight down the stairs and to the place where we jumped off. It wasn't too far down, but looking down when you're 6, 7, maybe even 8 feet above and you're afraid of heights, jumping off was pretty scary. However, after much contemplation…who am I kidding?...after 30 minutes of contemplating, I finally convinced myself to jump off of the platform and I did it! I may have screamed my lungs out but I did it! I can check off "jumping off of Taga Beach's platform" on my Tinian to-do list.

Our last day on Tinian was spent sleeping in and then walking to JC's Café to grab breakfast. Luckily, my sister was traveling to Tinian for work on the same morning and we got a ride to our Air BnB and then to the airport.



SAIPAN

We've all been through too much during this COVID-19 pandemic since March 28, 2020, but one thing my family and I learned during lockdown is that we need to adapt to the "new normal." This means making sure that we live our lives because the world doesn't stop for anyone. A few weeks ago, my family and I stayed at Aqua Resort Club in Achugao and boy, did we enjoy it! We only spent a night there but with Aqua's new check-in and check-out date, it felt like the whole weekend.

Our first night, we experienced this beautiful sunset that got brighter every time the sun was going down, which reminded me there are better days and the hardships will soon sail away.

This sweet treat can be found at Bubba Gump's restaurant once it reopens. My boyfriend's friend who works there gave us two stacks of warm and fresh, airlike, chocolate browning with vanilla ice-cream on the side and whipped cream to top it off. It was a really hot day that day and the vanilla ice cream just hit the spot! Let's hope that Bubba Gump will reopen soon so that everyone can enjoy this brownie with ice cream and whipped cream!

No one is safe from COVID-19, not even this fake mermaid at I Love Saipan in Garapan! They literally took the "no mask, no entry" seriously with this mermaid.

In pursuit of a new green

BEACABRERA
beecabbie@gmail.com
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

Victor Cabrera grew up around greens.

Coming from a family of farmers and surrounded by this environment while growing up, he shared this love of growing and nurturing plants with 8th graders as an Agriculture teacher at Hopwood Middle School and in videos he uploads on YouTube for farming enthusiasts.

It was perhaps unsurprising when he became the very first one awarded a commercial marijuana producer license in the CNMI, allowing him to jumpstart this industry that shows great potential for the Marianas. The CNMI Cannabis Commission awarded him the license in early March.

According to Cabrera, growing marijuana is no different from growing vegetables and crops. "In many ways, it is not so different for me as I always stick to growing organic as much as possible and I never, and will never, resort to pesticides or insecticides. The basics still apply such as proper nutrient feeds and watering schedule. As with every plant, those needs differ. With growing cannabis indoors, the biggest difference is now I work and manage a controlled growing environment, in addition to managing the plants' growth and development," he said.

In September 2020, when Cabrera first applied and received his Homegrown Registry Card to begin growing at home, he got started by collecting whatever varieties of seeds he could find on island. "As a long-time farmer, I used my knowledge and experience in hybridizing to begin crossing as many varieties as I could to create a seed bank of my own. I would collect pollen from various sources and use that to pollinate select female plants that I have grown. Through this process, I was able to begin growing my first generation of hybrids. I have since worked with several other registered home growers to further develop my hybrids and stabilize seeds to use as my seed bank for my indoor shop," he added.

The biggest similarity that Cabrera sees between growing marijuana and vegetables is the joy he gets in seeing their growth and development. "…[Besides] running a tight fertilizing and watering schedule, I monitor their nutrient feeding schedule via kelp meal, vermicast, and other organic amendments very closely as well as a watering schedule based on the plants' needs just as I would if I was growing corn or tomatoes," he added.

"In addition to the temperature and humidity controls, I also have to be very strict about my insect/pest management. Because of the closed environment, it is critical to ensure that no insects are allowed to enter the grow room, which, in turn, means I have to be very strict when it comes to allowing people to just walk in for a tour. Hence, I do not provide guided tours or 'quick visits' for anyone other than regulatory agencies like the Cannabis Commission, Department of Public Safety , and the Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services," he said.

On March 13, 2021, Cabrera officially started growing cannabis in his grow shop doing business as "T-Marianas" and sustainability is definitely on his list. "As a Class 1 Producer, I am not allowed to sell directly to consumers. All my products will be sold only to Retailers, Class 2 Lounges, Wholesalers, and future Testing Laboratories. …As a Class 1 Producer, I only have 750 square feet of growing space to work with. That is very small if we are talking about being sustainable. I am considering getting a second license for an-

other indoor grow room, which I will strictly use as a breeding/genetics room," he said.

"…Cloning the plants I have growing now will be able to sustain me for about a year at most without affecting the quality of the final product as much. Cross-breeding, stabilizing strains, and pollinating are something that I simply cannot do in my current space without affecting the quality of my main plants being grown for flower only. With a second growers license, I will be able to be fully sustainable in regard to developing new strains and consistent production," he added.

Initially, finally getting the license after several months of preparation was already exciting. "However, I soon began to realize that it also meant that the magnifying glass would be aimed directly at me in regard to the cannabis industry. The Cannabis Commission may focus on my development and make changes to policy based on my progress. In addition, Revenue and Taxation will also be keeping a close eye on my record-keeping abilities in order to ensure that I am always in full compliance with mandated taxes for the cannabis industry," he said.

"I am prepared for the constant review of all regulating agencies and that I will always remain in compliance in hopes that I will be able to help others in our newly growing cannabis industry. It is a great feeling to be the first licensed grower but, at the same time, it also feels like added responsibilities and constant changes come with it. Overall, working closely with the commission is something I look forward to so that needed changes can be made to ensure the sustainability of our cannabis industry here in the Marianas," he added.

To get in touch with Cabrera, send him an email at tmarianas670@gmail.com, go to his Facebook page, "T-Marianas Farms," or his Instagram account, @tmarianas670. He is planning to launch his website, www.tmarianasfarm.com, by the end of this month.

Janelle takes on **bigger role**

ROSELYN B.MONROYO
roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Staff Writer

The Northern Marianas Badminton Association recently held its election of officers and had 21-year-old Janelle Pangilinan as its youngest board director.

The newbie on the NMBA board has evolved from a summer camp participant to a key official of the association, as she accepted the challenge of taking more responsibilities in developing the sport of badminton in the CNMI.

"I was 11 years old when I first tried playing badminton. I joined a summer program sponsored by Badminton Oceania in 2011 and fell in love with the sport since then," said this Northern Marianas College graduate.

Pangilinan was content with just playing in tournaments for three years, winning a few of them, before exploring other areas of the sport.

In 2014, she began helping their team captain in umpiring and setting up competitions.

"As I gained more skills and knowledge in the sport, I also helped conduct clinics/teach badminton in summer camps in 2015 and 2016," Pangilinan said.

Fast-forward to 2019, with her strong showing at NMBA tournaments and notable performance in a couple of invitational events in Guam, Pangilinan was named to the CNMI National Team that competed in the Pacific Games for the first time. The Commonwealth squad's stint in the quadrennial event in Apia, Samoa was also its first international competition.

In between their preparations for the Pacific Games, Pangilinan attended an umpiring program sanctioned by Badminton Oceania and, after the competition, she also helped NMBA conduct Shuttle Time sessions (badminton clinic for students).

"There were many other rules and regulations of badminton that I needed to learn, and through these programs, it helped me gain that knowledge," the national player said.

Pangilinan hopes to attend similar programs this year as they prepare for other international events, including the 2022 Pacific Mini Games.

While getting ready for the Mini Games, which Saipan will be hosting, Pangilinan also spends time working with NMBA officials, as they've been discussing the group's programs and the national team's preparations for next year's event.

Becoming an NMBA official has always crossed her mind since she joined the group. She often thought of what it is like to be on the NMBA board and map out plans for the development of the sport and not just focused on playing in tournaments.

The national player likes the steps NMBA is taking right now amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as they are safely working their way to introducing badminton in schools through Shuttle Time. Pangilinan said seeing students learn the basic of badminton and grow interested in the sport brings back memories of her own experience a decade ago.

For

The tale of a **clueless housewife** and the burnt adobo

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Staff Writer

as long as I can remember, eating has always been my passion. Cooking, not so much. So you could imagine the pickle I was in when I was forced to not only learn to cook for myself, but a whole other human being too.

The day I got married, many told me that the first few months of marriage is supposed to be utter bliss. You're consumed with love and passion for one another, and just ultimately blinded by the euphoria of spending the rest of your days with your partner. For my husband and I, though, that wasn't the case. The first few months were a struggle, to say the least, and one of the struggles was mastering the art of not burning our meals.

I remember one of the many dishes I burnt was pork adobo, a staple dish in the Philippines that is both salty and tangy. I was watching YouTube videos (my holy grail) on how to make one.

Backstory, I brought my husband adobo back when we were dating and he loved it. Truth be told, it was actually my dad's cooking and I just took credit for it because he seemed so impressed. Fast forward a year later, he was craving for that amazing dish I had brought him once before.

I remember watching the video titled "How to make quick and easy pork adobo" on such a low volume that it was nearly inaudible. I wasn't going to have him hear what I was watching and find out I was a phony. After watching the video over and over and learning the ingredients by heart, I was ready, or so I thought.

You see, I memorized the ingredients and in what order they went, but I didn't pay attention to another crucial part of the recipe—the cooking time—and, most importantly, how much heat I should use.

So, I went on ahead, chopped my ingredients, threw them into my pan, let it cook, and I went on back into our bedroom. It was just my luck that as I was scrolling through Facebook, a friend of mine sees me online and decides to video chat with me.

I was so entertained by our conversation that I eventually forgot that I was cooking until I smelled something burning in our kitchen. As I dashed to the kitchen, the strong smell of burning meat that greeted me confirmed my worst fears. I hurriedly turned off the stove and prayed to every God out there that the meal was salvageable. I was almost afraid to open the lid of the pot. But when I did so, the once beautiful pork belly that I had bought for $10.99 a bag was black and stuck to the bottom of the pot and I was just crushed.

But I refused to give up. I thought to myself, "Water will save this, water fixes everything!" but, boy, was that another mistake.

I poured about a cup of water into the pot and turned the heat back on but, this time I didn't leave it. As the water began to boil, I started to stir the now hardened meat while also scraping the burnt sauce that was stuck to the bottom of the pot. After a few minutes, I decided it was done but I was afraid to taste it.

Come lunch time, my husband, excited for the amazing adobo that he was expecting, was shocked at the horrible dish I placed in front of him. But, thank heavens I married such a kind individual because, I kid you not, this man ate that horrible dish and managed to say, "This is really good, you just have to eat it with a lot of rice." That was the moment I learned that marriage is definitely not based on honesty.

Moth

Sirena Proje
Saipan

er Mermaid

ect aims to teach n women to swim

LINDSAYNASH
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

It is Sunday at Guma Sakman in Susupe and the smoky smell of barbecue dances in the breeze of the towering ironwoods. Puffy clouds stretch across the blue sky and children dart barefoot along the shoreline. The shiny waters of the lagoon beckon.

And a group of women answer the call.

Like the famed mermaid Sirena, goddess of seafarers, these women have been drawn to the sea. Some are overcoming fears. Some are improving their strokes. Some simply never learned to swim.

They are all part of a new initiative from 500 Sails called the Sirena Project to teach women and teenage girls on Saipan how to swim.

Led by seasoned swim instructor Emma Perez, the Sunday class attracts women of all ages and backgrounds to the sea.

"We're out here to do cultural revival," Perez says. "The thing about swimming is that people of the Marianas—from so many first-person accounts—were always said to be some of the best swimmers in the world."

This isn't necessarily the case now on Saipan. Just in March, a 56-year-old woman learning to swim drowned in the waters around the tanks in Susupe.

Perez, whose father is from Guam, didn't learn to swim herself until she was 40. She was an island girl growing up in the Bay Area of California and decided

to take advantage of an active swim community to learn how to swim.

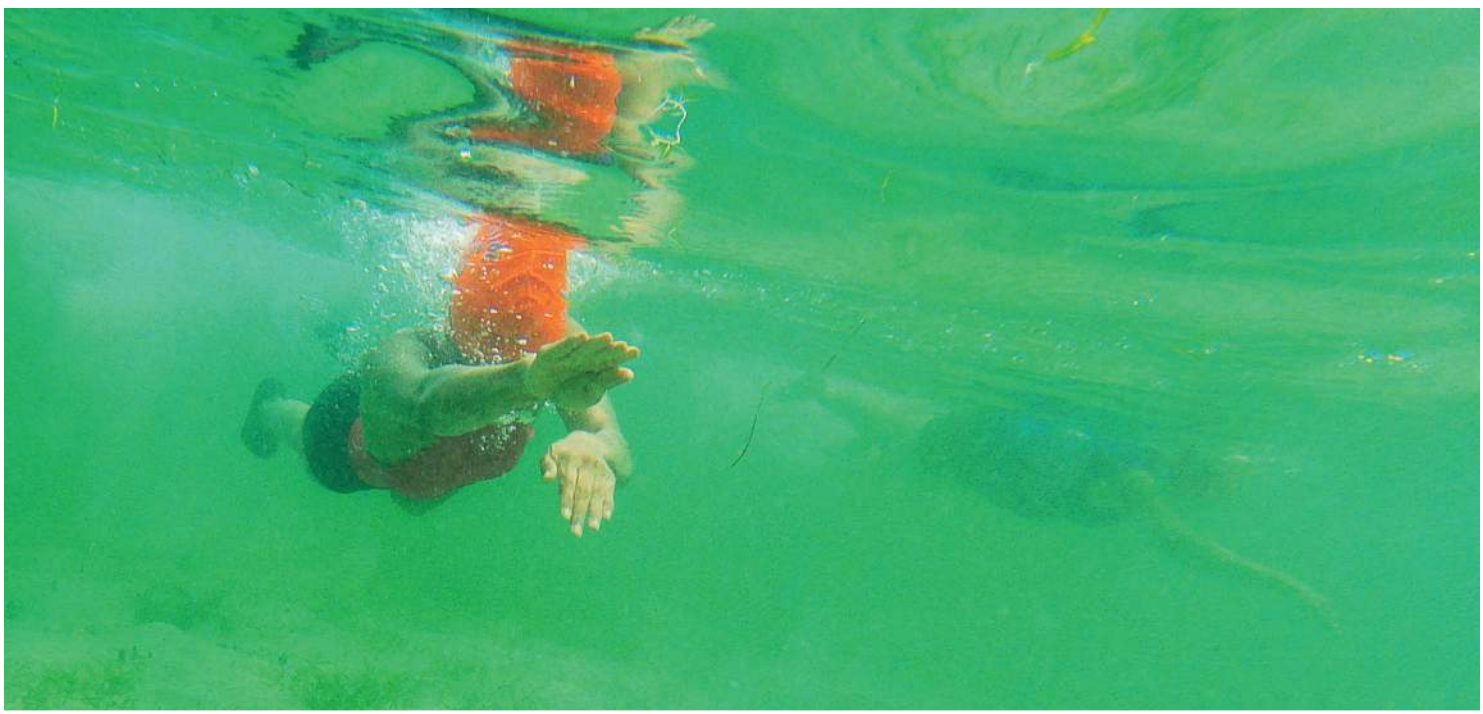
"I loved it. I started doing it for fun and to be healthy," Perez said.

Then, when she was 51, she became part of a team of Chamorro family members who swam the English Channel to raise money to build a Chamorro canoe—now 500 Sails' proud *Che'lu*, which celebrated its 10th birthday in March.

"We had a huge adult swimming community in San Francisco," Perez said. "We moved here and that wasn't the case. So we started to build a community."

And a community it has certainly become. Sundays offer a steady buzz of activity around the boathouse, the home base for 500 Sails. In addition to the women's swim lessons, the organization offers free sailing on the traditional Chamorro canoes and swim classes for teenagers who want to prepare for a lifeguard certification course.

"I know a lot of people don't swim, but I know how important it can be to a woman, who works really hard but never gets to play," Perez said. "So we get to play here."



> I know a lot of people don't swim, but I know how important it can be to a woman, who works really hard but never gets to play. So we get to play here.
>
> — Emma Perez

On this Sunday, a group of five women gather in the shallow waters, each adorned in a bright pink swim cap. Perez lines them up and gets to work. They stretch out across the water in a streamlined position, practicing their flutter kicks. Then their arm strokes. Then breathing on each side.

The women cheer for each other and laugh easily as they work toward their own personal goals in the water.

Even for new swimmer Eme Cabrera, the swim lessons are enjoyable, despite her fear of the water. "I have this fear—it's like the fear of falling," said Cabrera, who is trying to learn to swim so she can explore a passion for underwater photography through scuba diving. But to scuba dive, she must be comfortable in the water.

"I have this kickboard, and I can't let go of it," Cabrera said. "It's my safety net. But every week, I'm improving."

It's this desire to help women be comfortable in the water that inspires Perez to continue the program. She remembers teaching a local woman to swim at the pool in Marpi, and the day she taught her to float on her back.

"I remember it so well. I held her neck, held her back, and promised her I wouldn't let go. I told her to relax and look at the sky. I waited until her body relaxed and let go. Then she started sobbing because she'd never felt that before. She cried as she crawled out of the pool and said, 'God bless you, Emma.'"

"It's such a profound experience for women who have never felt that," Perez said. "You know, it's Mother Ocean. And that reaction from her––that's why I do it. To have fun. To be healthy. And, if the mothers swim, her family will swim. It's a no-brainer."

The Sirena Project swim classes are free for women and teenage girls on Sundays from 11am. to noon at Guma Sakman through June. All levels are welcome.

Clayton's change of heart gives birth to Miss Earth NMI

Dee Clayton has established herself as a bodybuilding event organizer and competitor for decades and it never crossed her mind to venture into beauty pageants until 2019.

Clayton, who has been hosting the Dee Clayton Classic Bodybuilding and Physique Competition on Saipan since 2011, is the president of Exquisite Productions, which oversees the Miss Earth Northern Marianas beauty pageant.

"In 2019, my plan was just to get involved in a modeling company for young adults, but as I was doing my research, I came across the pageant business that is more meaningful and has a purpose—Miss Earth," the Kagman resident said.

Founded in the Philippines in 2001 by Carousel Productions, Miss Earth seeks to promote environmental preservation through a beauty pageant. This prompted Clayton to eventually ditch her initial plan and hold Miss Earth on the islands to encourage the community and inspire the youth to take serious action for the protection and conservation of the environment.

The Exquisite Productions head admitted it was no easy feat holding a pageant, especially if you are having it for the first time. Clayton said

ROSELYN B.MONROYO
roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Staff Writer

they had to organize activities that fit the goals of Miss Earth while focusing on training the eight contestants.

"The first ever Miss Earth pageant was a challenge for me because I don't have any idea of how it operates, but because of my experience in organizing other events, I just went for it. A big plus was I had an amazing team to support me through it," said Clayton, who found volunteers from the community to assist her in the staging of the first-ever Miss Earth Northern Marianas competition that Leisha Deleon Guerrero won.

The second Miss Earth Northern Marianas was also tough, as Clayton and company held the event "virtually" due to the COVID-19 pandemic. No spectators were present at the crowning ceremony and only the judges and the production staff were allowed at the venue. Maria Terlaje won the competition, besting six other contestants.

This year, Clayton is hoping to return to the actual pageant and hold more activities that promote Miss Earth's advocacies.

Develop youth program in bodybuilding

After founding the longest-running bodybuilding competition in the CNMI, Clayton has taken a more active role in the development of the sport.

She is now the president of the NMI Bodybuilding and Physique Federation and one of her goals is to encourage more youth to get into the program.

In 2019, the Dee Clayton Classic drew 28 participants—the most the event has had since its inception 10 years ago. The record field had a participant as young as 16 years old. Last year, only seven competed due to the pandemic. This year, Clayton is hoping that the bodybuilding competition will rebound, as restrictions have been eased and athletes can go back to their regular training sessions.

With or without competition, Clayton, who started joining bodybuilding contests on and off-island in the 1990s, said bodybuilders must remain in shape year-round so they will always be ready when they are called on stage.

The son[s] also rises

MARKRABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Associate Editor

Kian and Eros Estolas

The sons of Jun "The Flash" Estolas and Remeliza Gutierrez are slowly making a name for themselves for Rollers Black's U11 (Kian) and U14 (Eros) age groups.

The 4'5" Kian is more of a defensive player compared to his *kuya*, Eros, who at 5'3" is a more prolific scorer and rebounder.

While Kian doesn't necessarily idolize anyone outside his father, Eros is a diehard Stephen Curry fan and naturally roots for the Golden State Warriors.

Their father said his hopes for Kian and Eros is to reach their full potential in the sport and someday play professionally, specifically in Asia's first play-for-pay league, the Philippine Basketball Association.

Lance Lerio

The 14-year-old is the only child of sharpshooter Sonny Lerio and his wife, Airen. Prior to suiting up for the Rollers Black's U14 team, the 5'10" Lance was the Finals MVP of the RBA U13 league in 2020.

Lance learned the ropes by watching his pops play in various recreational leagues on Saipan. He then suited up for the varsity team of Grace Christian Academy until sixth grade before transferring to Mount Carmel School for seventh grade where he continues to be a part of the Catholic school's varsity team.

Like his father, the younger Lerio excels in shooting from afar but due to height and heft has been used a lot at center. He oozes potential and Sonny Lerio said he wouldn't be surprised if his son follows the footsteps of Jericho Cruz in the PBA. Aside from Cruz, Lance also looks up to two-time NBA regular season MVP Stephen Curry.

Algelle Miguel Surima

Another player of the Rollers Black's U11 team is the son of Michael Surima, the resident enforcer of many commercial leagues on island.

Like his father, Algelle Miguel also plays the 1 and 2 positions and his favorite player is Hall of Fame guard Steve Nash. A diehard Los Angeles Lakers fan, he plays basketball as a way of overcoming his asthma.

The 4'9" Algelle Miguel also plays soccer but took up basketball after seeing his father excel and make a name for himself in various recreational leagues on Saipan.

His father said his son is currently getting a lot of basketball tutelage from Rollers coaches and hopes someday that Algelle Miguel will fulfill all his dreams in the sport.

Dave Tibayan

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Passing on the family business happens not just in the corporate world but also holds true in sports, especially in the NBA as second-generation players abound like the Currys (dad Dell and sons Stephen and Seth), the Thompsons (dad Mychal and son Klay), the Waltons (dad Bill and son Luke), and of course the Bryants (dad Joe and his son, the late Kobe).

The recent Rollers Basketball Association 2021 Spring Madness League saw many second-generation players take flight as the monthlong competition featured play in the U11, U14, U17, and U19 divisions.

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Derek Tenorio

The King of Assists in the RBA 2021 Spring Madness League, the 4'3" Tenorio makes up for his lack of height with blinding speed, excellent shooting, and dribbling wizardry.

At his young age, his vision on the court is unparalleled, that's why he led the recent league in dole-outs. A certified basketball nut, he grew up and was highly influenced by watching his father's games with his friends in Hoopaholics and Rollers.

No less than RBA founder and multi-titled coach Joe Diaz recognized Derek's potential when he first saw him while tagging along with his father during practices at the Garapan basketball court.

The son of Dexter Tenorio and Ariane Baculod, Derek's dream is to play basketball professionally and his dad fully supports that and even intimated he and his wife are willing to send him to the U.S. mainland to further his training. He idolizes Brooklyn Nets all-star guard Kyrie Irving and legendary Hall of Famer Allen Iverson.

Khristian Itaas

The regular season MVP of the 2021 Spring Madness League U19 age group, Khristian is the son of human pogo stick and many time MVP and scoring champion Leo Itaas and his wife Merly.

The 5'11" Khristian also is following in his famous father's footsteps by not only leading his division in scoring, but also in assists. Aside from obviously shooting and passing the rock, the 19-year-old Sonic forward also boasts a superior IQ on the basketball court.

Growing up, he idolized the late, great Kobe Bryant of the Purple and Gold, but lately has seen himself rooting more and more for Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors.

His father's dream for his athletic son is to see him play for the CNMI national basketball team and earn a college basketball scholarship.

Brian Mendiola

The 6'3" starting center of the U19 Sonics is the eldest child of Department of Fire and Emergency Management Services Dennis C. Mendiola and Ana Salas Mendiola, a counselor at Saipan Southern High School and a trustee of the Northern Marianas Technical Institute.

The elder Mendiola used to go by the name Dennis Camacho, a former starting center of the CNMI national basketball team.

The younger Mendiola is still pretty raw and his talent needs more development, according to his father. But at this age, he is already a very strong rebounder and a team-oriented player.

"He needs to get stronger in his post-up game. But that definitely comes with maturity. I'd love for him to destroy my legacy by surpassing it and being better than I ever was," said the elder Mendiola, a retired U.S. Army captain from Rota.

Mini Games logo features culture and community

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
TAGA *Plus* Staff Writer

With the CNMI hosting its very first Pacific Mini Games in 2022—the biggest multi-sport event in the Pacific region—it is the perfect time to showcase the islands' culture and the event's logo promises exactly that.

The creator of the logo, Kadi Marshal Yamada Camacho, was born and raised on Saipan and graduated from the University of Guam and currently serves as a biology teacher on his home island. As a CNMI native, he entered the logo competition with the mindset of featuring the islands' rich culture that has withstood the test of time and its close-knit community.

"I wanted to [showcase] the latte stones, people supporting each other, and a mwàar. So, that is what I chose in the logo—cultural icons that symbolize community support (latte stones) and celebration (mwàar)," he said.

Camacho, who is a rookie in event logo designs, said he drew inspiration from past Mini Games logos that showcased objects from the hosting country's culture.

The artist stated that it was his first time designing a logo that would be used for such a large event, but has spent time creating simple illustrations and designs for use in presentations and school projects.

"I looked at past designs of Mini Games logos and saw that they were drawing from a cultural icon or building on that motif. For example, the 2019 Pacific Games in Samoa had a motif of the bowl they serve `ava (a traditional drink like kava/sakau) in. Symbolically, that is one motif that is important to their culture. However, it would not be fair to feature only one symbol from our islands, so I wanted to [incorporate] the latte stones and a mwàr," Camacho said.

Despite the success of his logo design, Camacho said he wasn't able to enjoy fully his achievement because he was focused on completing his final year in college. On top of that, it was around the time the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. "If I may be frank, it was not all that satisfying as I had thought it would be. Yes, the design was complimented, and I felt satisfaction that it had been accepted, but the timeline was weird. Around the time I received news in early 2020 that my design had won, rumors of a viral epidemic were spreading fast and I was entering my senior year of college. Not many other things to focus on, so the win was at the back of my mind," he said.

Nevertheless, Camacho felt a sense of satisfaction after he was named the winner of the logo competition because, despite entering the competition just to test his skills after getting a new tablet, his efforts were rewarded with his work living on as the CNMI's first Mini Games logo.

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